

# Advent Guide



2025



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Redemption Church  
117 W. Main St.  
Edmond OK, 73003  
[redemptionedmond.com](http://redemptionedmond.com)

# ad·vent

/ˈad ,vent/

noun

The arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.

The first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays.

synonyms

arrival, appearance, emergence, materialization, occurrence, dawn,  
birth, rise, development

## **WHY SHOULD WE CELEBRATE ADVENT?**

In a season busy with shopping, family, meals, decorating, and traveling, we often forget what all the busyness is about—or at least what it should be about. Observing the season of Advent is a way to interrupt the busyness and re-orient our hearts and minds toward the arrival of Jesus. Advent expands the Christmas celebration to include the four weeks prior to it. In doing so, our observance becomes a practice that can help aim our wandering hearts and quiet our busy souls as we reflect on the Christmas story.

Advent helps us remember and dwell on what God has done for us in sending Christ. It's also a way for us to link arms with the generations that have gone before us, and experience their same anticipation as they eagerly awaited the coming Messiah who would take away the sin of the world. Lastly, it helps us to long and pray for the return of Jesus and his establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth. This will be our eternal dwelling place, filled with peace and light beyond imagination.

## **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

Our hope is that this guide will be a tool that helps you carve out some intentional time with God, friends, and family throughout the Christmas season. Each week includes a passage of scripture, a devotional, reflection questions, prayers, songs, and activities. Invite a friend or neighbor to join you and talk through what you are learning. If you have children, consider making this a special weekly activity to build anticipation toward Christmas.

Each week will have additional material after the benediction for those who want to spend some extra time in meditation on the themes of Advent.

## **ADVENT WREATH HOW-TO GUIDE:**

- 1) Gather four candles of your choice (any kind will do).
- 2) Place them in a line or circle on a surface that won't be damaged by wax.
- 3) Optional: Spruce it up with some holly, ribbon, or winter greenery.

Light a candle each week during your time of reflection. Each week is meant to build toward the next, until all four candles are lit during your Advent reflection time. Parents, kids love lighting the candles! Help them understand anticipation, excitement, joy, and longing as they light each candle.

# Hope

Week One



## LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Lord, you know what distracted hearts we have, O give us self-recollection; you know what hard, dead hearts we have; O touch and awaken us! You know how we yet resist your Word and our lower nature is reluctant to bow to your scepter; therefore, O Lord, show forth your power; send your Spirit on high to work among us, to make our hearts submissive, and ourselves capable of living in true union with you, our salvation, and of yielding totally to your grace. Amen.

- *Gerhard Tersteegen*

### **SCRIPTURE READING**

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

- Jeremiah 33:14-16

### **DEVOTIONAL**

The English word "hope" is a poor rendition of the true biblical idea. Our word hope leaves some level of uncertainty...."Will you get to see family for Christmas?"..."I'm not sure, but I hope so." There's uncertainty there. The real meaning of hope, however, is certain. It is founded in the eternal story of our great God and Creator, and we are included in that story. What a privilege!

Biblical hope is the life-shaping certainty of something that hasn't happened yet but that you know will. It is a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:19), not some fleeting wish or dream, as we often treat it. We can have confident hope because God and His promises are certain. God has granted me and you a part in His eternal story and given us His Word filled with promises from Genesis to Revelation. This gives us hope that should fuel every aspect of our lives.

There is no better time than the Advent season to remember and celebrate this marvelous hope. The birth of Jesus – followed by His life, death, and resurrection – was the beginning of the climax of God’s story to rescue mankind through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. The birth of Jesus was promised throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Matthew 1:22-23). It was hoped for by generations, then celebrated by many (Matthew 2:2; Luke 1:42-44; Luke 2:20, 27-32, 38). The hope of a long-awaited Messiah was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus, the incarnate God. Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life we could never live. Through Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice on the cross, you and I can continue to have hope in this life for eternity. The promise of Isaiah 9:6-7 is a radically hopeful, certain message:

“For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And his name will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David’s throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.”

And the story doesn’t end there. God invites us to be a part of it. When we accept Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins, we are given His Spirit to guide and comfort us. He has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:4). He promises to work all things for our good (Romans 8:28) and even uses suffering to produce endurance, character, and hope in us (Romans 5:3). This is life-changing.

He promises He will return and all of creation will be redeemed – no more sorrow, no more death, no more sin, new heavens, new earth, glorified bodies, reunited souls (Revelation 21:1-4). Our glorious eternity is certain. This is the most hopeful story imaginable!



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*How will you celebrate this hope in the Advent season? How should this hope reshape your life?*

*With whom in your life can you share this hope?*

## PRAISE

*'Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus'*  
*Written by Charles Wesley*  
*Recommended Version:*  
*The Arcadian Wild*

Come, thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in Thee  
Israel's strength and consolation  
Hope of all the Earth Thou art  
Dear desire of every nation  
Joy of every longing heart

Born Thy people to deliver  
Born a child and yet a king

Born to reign in us forever  
Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone  
By Thine all-sufficient merit  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne  
Come, thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in Thee  
Israel's strength and consolation  
Hope of all the Earth Thou art...

Dear desire of every nation  
Joy of every longing heart

## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time in prayer for the weak and afflicted in our city, in desperate need of hope. Pray for children and teenagers in foster care, for widows, for prisoners, for those experiencing homelessness.

## BENEDICTION

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

- Romans 15:13

*For Further Reflection - The following are optional additions for those who want to linger longer in the theme of Hope this week.*

## **ACTIVITY**

Plan to go look at Christmas lights or see a Christmas performance one evening this week with your friends, your spouse, or your family. Use that time to consider what hopes you have for this Christmas season. Ask your friends or family the same question.

Luminance

Mitch Park, 1501 W Covell Rd, Edmond, OK 73003

5pm - 10pm Daily

Christmas in the Park

Chisholm Trail Park, 2200 S Holly Ave, Yukon, OK 73099

6pm - 11pm Daily

## **MEDITATION**

"We tend to fill our Christmases with all sorts of expectations. But the biblical pattern teaches us that Jesus is not particularly concerned with our expectations and may ignore them altogether because he's mainly concerned with our most desperate needs. We typically do not choose our most desperate places – the places of our fears and sins – as places to encounter and worship Jesus, but he does. He knows that these are the places we most need the thrill of hope.

This is why I expect to find Jesus in the sober celebrations of dear friends who, due to an aggressive cancer, may be sharing their last Christmas together. This is why I expect to find him at the hospital bedside of a precious little boy, where his parents have kept faithful vigil since the traumatic brain injury three months ago. This is why I expect to find him in the heartbroken home of a pastor I love who broke his marriage vows and in the heartbroken church whose Christmas worship will be full of unexpected disappointment and tears. And this is why I expect to find him in the places of my own groaning: my sinful stumbling, persistent weaknesses, perplexing questions, and parenting quandaries that I am not wise enough to think my way through.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying pleasant holidays. But often it is not pleasant holidays that we need as much as we need profound hope. What we really need is hope that our devastating sins can be forgiven, that our shattered trust can be rebuilt, that our broken child's suffering isn't in vain, and that though our bodies waste away (2 Corinthians 4:16), death will be swallowed up in victory and destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54)."

- Jon Bloom, from the article, *'Come Thou Long Expected Jesus'*

## POETRY

*'Descent'*

By Malcom Guite

They sought to soar into the skies  
Those classic gods of high renown  
For lofty pride aspires to rise  
But you came down.  
You dropped down from the  
mountains sheer  
Forsook the eagle for the dove  
The other Gods demanded fear  
But you gave love  
Where chiseled marble  
seemed to freeze  
Their abstract and perfected form  
Compassion brought you  
to your knees  
Your blood was warm

They called for blood in sacrifice  
Their victims on an altar bled  
When no one else  
could pay the price  
You died instead  
They towered above  
our mortal plain,  
Dismissed this restless flesh  
with scorn,  
Aloof from birth  
and death and pain,  
But you were born.  
Born to these burdens,  
borne by all  
Born with us all 'astride the grave'  
Weak, to be with us when we fall,  
And strong to save.

# Peace

Week Two



## *LIGHT THE FIRST & SECOND CANDLES*

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Heavenly Father, may you grant us to comprehend your holy Word according to your divine will, that we may learn from it to put all our confidence in you alone, and withdraw it from all other creatures; moreover, that also our old man with all his lusts may be crucified more and more each day, and that we may offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice, to the glory of your holy name and to the edification of our neighbor, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

- Zacharias Ursinus

### **SCRIPTURE READING**

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

- Isaiah 40:1-11

## DEVOTIONAL

*(A full reading of Isaiah 55 is encouraged for further reflection.)*

Long before Jesus arrived, Isaiah prophesied his coming. In Isaiah 55, he speaks of a Lord who satisfies (verse 2, "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food",) leads (verse 12, "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace",) and glorifies his people (verse 5, "the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you".) A Lord who is good, kind, and compassionate. A Lord who forgives and will one day renew creation.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Wichita Wildlife Refuge near Lawton, OK. It's a bit of a drive, but a good day trip to get away from the city. A place that you can envision God's creation before the fall of man (or at least I can). I found a solitary place away from the trails where I could sit and just...*be*. I felt the warmth of the sun on my skin and the cool breeze as it blew my ponytail sideways. I saw the leaves on the trees, which were already changing to shades of yellow, orange, and red. I heard the sounds of animals nearby and the insects raising a cacophony of praises. God's natural creation moves something deep inside of me. These outdoor sanctuaries are where I feel closest to Him and where I feel the most peace.

Peace...

Abundant peace...

Especially during busy seasons, we may struggle to make time to tap into God's abundant peace. There are so many plans to make, tasks to accomplish, and events to attend. And, despite Advent being the time during which we look forward to celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace, we miss out on that offering. We forget that peace does not simply come upon us. Even the shepherds and wise men had to seek the manger to find this peace (see Luke 2:13-15 & Matthew 2:1-2). Even David knew he had a part to play in finding God's peace. He wrote in Psalm 34:14, "seek peace and pursue it."

So where do you, personally, experience this closeness to God and the peace that he offers? Is it out in nature, like me? Is it a special corner of your house that you set aside for quiet moments? Or maybe it's watching your child sleep –marveling at the goodness of God in their every, peaceful breath. Whatever

it is for you, I want to encourage you to intentionally take time this week to seek that peace. Don't wait until you have the time for it; it's worth too much to leave it at the end of the to-do list. Seek it. Pursue it. Dwell in it.

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all." 2 Thessalonians 3:16

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Take time to reflect on the question posed in the devotional - where and how can you seek the peace of the Lord during Advent?*

*One of the primary ways many of us experience a lack of peace is in strained relationships- who can you extend an invitation of peace to this week?*

## PRAISE

*'Hark, The Herald Angels Sing'*  
*Written by Charles Wesley,*  
*Recommended Version:*  
*Jeremy Riddle*

Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With angelic hosts proclaim  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored  
Christ, the everlasting Lord  
Late in time behold him come  
Offspring of the Virgin's womb

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell  
Jesus, our Immanuel  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heaven-born  
Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings  
Risen with healing in his wings  
Mild he lays his glory by  
Born that man no more may die Born  
to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"

## **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

Spend some time praying for the peace of God to multiply in the world: for countries and peoples caught in war and conflict, for the healing of societal and political division in our country, and for the unification and restoration of broken families.

## **BENEDICTION**

The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

- Numbers 6:24-26

*For Further Reflection - The following are optional additions for those who want to linger longer in the theme of Peace this week.*

## **ACTIVITY**

Set aside some time to sing Christmas carols with family and/or friends! This can be as simple as putting on a Christmas record or pulling up a Spotify playlist. Or you can gather family and friends and go caroling in your neighborhood or attend a Christmas concert together. If you're able, you can make plans to join us for our Main Street Carol Sing on Friday, December 12th, at Redemption Church, 117 W Main St, in Downtown Edmond. Family fun and food trucks begin at 5:00 pm, and caroling begins at 6:30 pm.

## **MEDITATION**

"God's purpose is to give you peace by being the most glorious Person in your life. Five times in the New Testament he is called "the God of peace" (Romans 15:13; 16 :20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). And Jesus said, "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). And Paul said, "Jesus himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). What this means is that the peace of God, or the peace of Christ, can never be separated from God himself and Christ himself. If we want peace to rule in our lives, God must rule



in our lives. Christ must rule in our lives. God's purpose is not to give you peace separate from himself. His purpose is to give you peace by being the most glorious Person in your life. So the key to peace is keeping together what the angels keep together: Glory to God, and peace to man. A heart bent on showing the glory of God, will know the peace of God.

And what holds the two together – God getting glory and us getting peace – is believing or trusting the promises of God obtained by Jesus.

Romans 15:13 is one of those fundamental texts pointing to this crucial role of faith. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." In believing. In other words, the way God's promises become real for us and produce peace in us and through us is "in believing." When we believe them. That's true whether we are talking about peace with God, peace with ourselves, or peace with others."

-John Piper, from the sermon, *'A Savior is Born: Glory to God, Peace to Man'*

## POETRY

*'Peace and Joy in Believing'*

By John Newton

Sometimes a light surprises  
The Christian while he sings;  
It is the Lord who rises  
With healing in his wings:  
When comforts are declining,  
He grants the soul again  
A season of clear shining,  
To cheer it after rain.

In holy contemplation,  
We sweetly then pursue  
The theme of God's salvation,  
And find it ever new:  
Set free from present sorrow,  
We cheerfully can say,  
E'en let th' unknown to-morrow  
Bring with it what it may.

It can bring with it nothing  
But he will bear us through;  
Who gives the lilies clothing,  
Will clothe his people too:  
Beneath the spreading heavens,  
No creature but is fed;  
And he who feeds the ravens,  
Will give his children bread.

Though vine nor fig-tree neither  
Their wonted fruit shall bear,  
Though all the field should wither,  
Nor flocks nor herds be there:  
Yet God the same abiding,  
His praise shall tune my voice;  
For while in him confiding,  
I cannot but rejoice.

# Joy

Week Three



## LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, & THIRD CANDLES

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Almighty God, I earnestly ask you for such a deeper fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in the blessed Scriptures, that when I open them, I may perceive his mind in what I read, and immediately hear in them his voice to myself. I ask you for a quicker understanding of spiritual things, for more desire to understand, a fuller perception of your promise in the church, that I may become teachable, and may love that by which you will teach me. Amen.

*- Henry Witherspoon*

### **SCRIPTURE READING**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

*- Isaiah 35*

## DEVOTIONAL

*"Joy to the world, the Lord is come." "Oh, tidings of comfort and joy." "O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant." "And the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains." "Joyful all ye nations rise."*

For all the many reasons that Christmas is a unique season among all the others, I find one of the biggest reasons is that it's the only season where you can pick up groceries at Walmart, or grab a tube of neon pickleballs at Dick's Sporting Goods, or pay out your life savings for a pinch of guacamole at Chipotle, or wander aimlessly through the haunted ruins that are the few remaining shopping malls and hear the call for Gospel joy ringing out all around you. Even the greatest shrines our culture has built to the idols of consumerism, comfort, luxury, leisure, and self-worship can't help but echo the song of the angels that brought terror and tears of joy to the faces of those shepherds over 2,000 years ago. And while that irony can stir courage and comfort in us as those who seek that Christ-centric joy in every season, it should strike a discordant note in our hearts as well. *Why does a world so marked by joylessness, depression, anger, division, addiction, and perversity of every kind sing these songs every December?*

Friends, let us not fall into the deathly-comfortable illusion that the world sings these songs because underneath all the grime and grit, it's really just made up of joyful people trying to do their best. The fact that these hymns of Christmas have endured countless culture changes and shifts away from God's vision for flourishing life is a testament to the great *ache* that is at the bottom of every wandering heart. Our world is one in desperate need of joy; a joy deeper than a mere fleeting "happiness." And while the human heart, unaided by the work of the Holy Spirit, is unable to see how that true joy is found in Christ alone, it can perceive that there's a glimmer of that joy in the works and lives of those who have truly experienced it. They lean into Christmas festivities each year, hoping that the themes of peace on earth and joy to the world might rub off on them and their communities; in reality, they're like soldiers on the bleakest battlefield, applying band-aids to bullet-holes, hoping that might staunch the bleeding.

But they're on to something. What if this Christmas season, we refused to pass up any opportunity to meet the eyes of those without the joy of Christ in their hearts and tell them, "the stories are true"? What if this year, instead of contributing to strife and division with defensiveness and distance, we went

out of our way to proclaim that tidings of comfort and joy aren't just traditional song lyrics, but unshakable, invitational realities? The world is deeply hungry for the true joy of Christmas; let's invite them into the feast as we, along with the fields, floods, rocks, hills, and plains, repeat the sounding joy.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*What has kept you from sharing the joy of Christ in the past? How do you need the Lord to meet you in that? Take some time to ask Him for that help.*

*Who in your life can you share your joy with this Christmas?*

## PRAISE

*'Joy to the World (Joyful Joyful)'*

*Written by Isaac Watts*

*Recommended Version:*

*Phil Wickham*

Joy to the world, the Lord is come

Let Earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare Him room

And Heaven and nature sing

And Heaven and nature sing

And Heaven and Heaven

And nature sing

We will sing, sing, sing

Joy to the world

We will sing, sing, sing

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns

Let men their songs employ

While fields and floods

Rocks, hills, and plains

Repeat the sounding joy

Repeat the sounding joy

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy

(Refrain)

He rules the world

With truth and grace

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

And wonders of His love

And wonders of His love

And wonders, wonders of His love

(Refrain)

Joyful, joyful we adore Thee

God of Glory, Lord of Love

Hearts unfold

Like flowers before Thee

Opening to the sun above

## **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

Spend some time in prayer for those who are grieving this Christmas, both broadly and by name, for those you know. Pray for the Lord to bring comfort and joy to your own family where there is pain and sadness.

## **BENEDICTION**

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- Ephesians 3:20-21

*For Further Reflection - The following are optional additions for those who want to linger longer in the theme of Peace this week.*

## **ACTIVITY**

Spend some time in silent reflection, clearing your mind of all anxiety and resting in the reality of God. If you are doing this activity with kids, you might start with one minute and then try two or three. If you're doing this activity without kids, try doing ten minutes.

To begin, set a timer for the length of time you choose. Once you start the timer, try to clear your mind and focus on the reality that God is with us. Other thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay. When those thoughts come, refocus your mind on God and, if it's helpful, you can quickly pray about the thoughts that come up before refocusing your mind silently back on God.

## **MEDITATION**

"Like many others, I have sung "Joy to the World" my whole life. Perhaps because I did not think through the lyrics deeply, I assumed that this was a song about the first coming of Christ as a baby, since we often sing it at

Christmas. But how can that be, since this song celebrates the eradication of the curse, which is still a part of our present reality?

The song we sing as “Joy to the World” is Isaac Watts’s rendering of Psalm 98, which is about the coming of the Lord. What becomes clear, in light of what we know about the first coming of Christ as a suffering servant, is that Psalm 98 is more about his second coming as triumphant king. When Jesus came the first time, earth did not receive her king but instead hung him on a cross. Even after his death and resurrection, sin and sorrow still grow, and the thorny effects of the curse remain. The nations do not yet prove the glories of his righteousness.

But when Christ comes again, all will be different. Every knee will bow this time. It won’t be just be humanity celebrating his coming; the earth itself will rejoice. The curse will finally be gone for good so that all of creation will be set free from decay to worship Christ. People from every tribe and nation will gladly crown him as king. This is why there is so much joy in “Joy to the World.” It anticipates joy when Christ comes the second time—when the kingdom he established at his first coming will be consummated as the reality we will live in forever.

So it is possible to have a happy Thanksgiving, a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year—even when that joy is mixed with sorrow. Hope and joy at Christmas come from knowing that Christ’s life that began in a cradle ended on a cross. His death-conquering death was followed by resurrection, the first-fruits of all who will one day rise from their graves. Because of his death and resurrection, we can be sure that the day will come when we sing together like never before, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found!” On that day, we will look each other in the eye and say, “This was worth waiting for! The curse is gone for good! Our hearts, minds, and bodies are no longer broken but healed and whole! We put our hope in Christ, and he has proved worthy of our trust!”

- Nancy Guthrie, from the article, *‘Joy to This Cursed World’*

## POETRY

### *'Christmas Eve'*

By Christina Rossetti

Christmas hath darkness  
Brighter than the blazing noon,  
Christmas hath a chillness  
Warmer than the heat of June,  
Christmas hath a beauty  
Lovelier than the world can show:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.

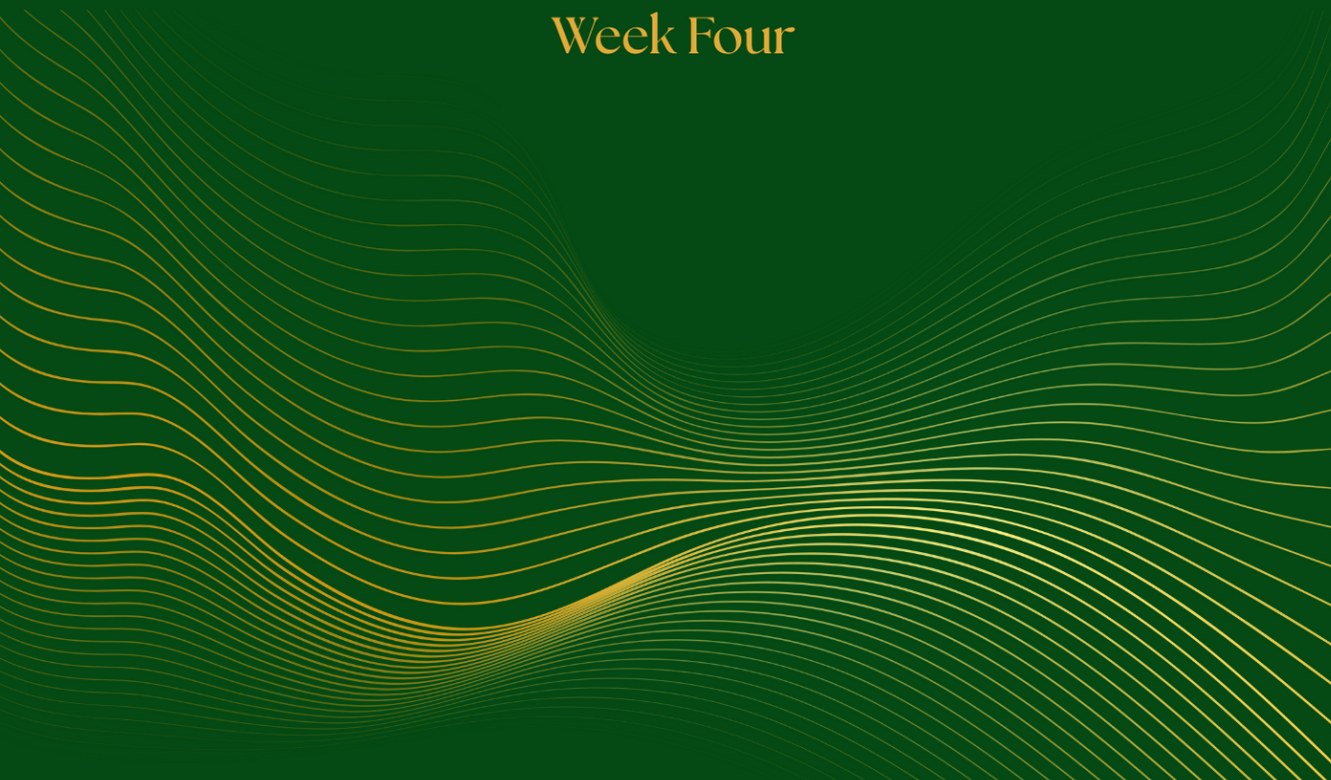
Earth, strike up your music,  
Birds that sing and bells that ring;  
Heaven hath answering music  
For all Angels soon to sing:  
Earth, put on your whitest Bridal  
robe of spotless snow:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.





# Love

Week Four



## LIGHT ALL FOUR CANDLES

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Almighty God, enter our hearts, and so fill us with your love, that, forsaking all evil desires, we may embrace you, our only good. Show unto us, for your mercies' sake, O Lord our God, what you are unto us. Say unto our souls, "I am your salvation." So speak that we may hear. Our hearts are before you; open our ears; let us hasten after your voice and take hold of you. Amen.

- Augustine

### SCRIPTURE READING

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

- Matthew 1:18-25

### DEVOTIONAL

Maybe, like me, you enjoyed Christmas a lot more when you were a kid. Back then, it felt magical, festive, exciting, something you waited all year for. But as you've gotten older, the season can feel more like a chore than a celebration. Travel plans, deciding which parents get Christmas morning, and navigating

complicated family dynamics can all crowd out joy. I get it. We live in a busy, exhausting world.

Becoming a father has taught me something about love: sometimes it is incredibly inconvenient. Do I want to change a diaper two minutes after putting on a clean one? Do I enjoy running on three hours of sleep while trying to work and invest in people? Not particularly. But I do want my daughter to be healthy, comfortable, and cared for. And even though parenting brings inconveniences, the blessings far outweigh them. Still, the truth remains: real love often calls us into things that are difficult. I think the enemy of love in our culture today is convenience. We have been told that love should always be easy, effortless, and on our terms. But that is simply not true.

The greatest example of love the world has ever known is the gospel. It begins with an all-powerful God willingly taking on the limitations of a human body for the sake of people who had done nothing to deserve it. That is the opposite of convenience. And not only did Christ become a man for us, He died for us. His love is fundamentally different from anything else we experience.

So as Advent comes to a close and Christmas arrives, remember the love Christ showed us on the Cross: a self-giving, self-sacrificing love. And as we step into the inconveniences of travel, family, and holiday plans, see them not as burdens but as opportunities to reflect that same love in our own spheres of influence.

As we approach a new year, what if we chose to see inconvenience differently? Not as a cause for stress, but as an invitation to embody the love of Christ wherever He has placed us.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

*Where are some areas that you can practice changing your view of inconveniences as invitations to share Christ's love?*

*Spend some time praying—what are some sacrificial ways you can display Christ's love to your community this season?*

## **PRAISE**

*'O Come All Ye Faithful'*

*Written by John Francis Wade*

*Recommended Version:*

*Casting Crowns*

O come all ye faithful  
Joyful and triumphant  
O come ye o come ye  
To Bethlehem  
Come and behold Him  
Born the King of angels  
O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore Him  
Christ the Lord

Sing choirs of angels  
Sing in exhalation  
Sing all ye citizens  
Of Heaven above

Glory to God

Glory in the highest

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

Christ the Lord

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee

Born this happy morning

Jesus to Thee be all glory given

Word of the Father

Now in flesh appearing

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

Christ the Lord

## **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

Spend some time praying for God's love in salvation to spread throughout the world. Pray for unreached peoples, pray for your friends and family who do not know Jesus, and pray that the church would grow in modeling God's love.

## **BENEDICTION**

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*For Further Reflection - The following are optional additions for those who want to linger longer in the theme of Love this week.*

## ACTIVITY

Plan a night to eat dinner with your family or friends. Over dinner, share about how you have experienced love from them. Tell a story of a time when their actions communicated love to you.

Then discuss some ways you could together love a neighbor, family member, or stranger, this Christmas season. This could be something as simple as baking cookies and delivering them with a note, making a handmade gift or ornament for someone, buying someone else dinner, or purchasing a gift for someone. Be creative. It doesn't have to be big or complicated.

As you love others this week, consider first how much God has shown his love for you through Jesus. Afterward, discuss how loving others affected you. Did it help you reflect upon how God loves you? Did it stir your heart more for Jesus? Was it difficult or challenging?

## MEDITATION

"In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders. Or one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too."

- C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

## POETRY

### A Christmas Poem

By John Piper

In this smelly place he lay,  
Smelly like the swine,  
Smelly like the rotting hay,  
Like your sin, and mine.  
Do you see how low he lay?  
Do you see how low?  
There is lower yet to go.  
Lower yet to go.

He is lying where they eat,  
Lying where the swine—  
Lying like a piece of meat  
Where the hungry dine.  
Do you see the flow complete  
Do you see the flow?  
There is greater love to show  
Greater love to show.

Such a happy toddler there,  
Happy like the birds,  
Happy like the morning air  
Filled with happy words.  
Does he see or know or care?  
Does he see or know:  
O, how deep will be his woe  
Deep will be his woe?

Knowing God was born like this  
Knowing this is he,  
Knowing somehow this is bliss  
For the swine and me,  
Is this love's full glow and kiss?  
Is this love's full glow?  
There are deeper things to know,  
Deeper things to know.

Mary musing every year,  
Musing on her son,  
Musing with a rising fear  
Who will be the one:  
Who will strike the blow and spear?  
Who will strike the blow?  
Does she know  
that blood must flow?  
Know that blood must flow?

Jesus hanging on the tree,  
Hanging like the meat,  
Hanging there for swine like me,  
Gives his flesh to eat.  
Here is Life brought low and free.  
Here is Life brought low.  
O, how vast the debt I owe  
Vast the debt I owe.

## CONTRIBUTORS

This Advent Guide was produced by the following members and staff of Redemption Church:

**Angela McBride** - Week 1 Devotional

**Christine Edwards** - Week 2 Devotional

**Carson Woodard** - Week 3 Devotional, Editor

**Tate Briggs** - Week 4 Devotional

**Jennifer Johnson** - Graphics

**Chace Ifland** - Editor

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